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Document delivery demand and service review at the University of Kent

Abstract

Purpose – This paper investigates the document delivery demand at the University of Kent and describes the recent changes to the document delivery service and their impact.

Design/methodology/approach – Statistical data from 2007 to 2015 and user feedback have been examined.

Findings – There is a combination of reasons behind the high level of demand for ILL material at the University of Kent, most notably the specific needs of users and library policy regarding document delivery.

Originality/value – A study of one of the very few UK universities to experience an increase in ILL in the last few years.

Keywords – document delivery demand, interlibrary loans, interlibrary lending

Paper type – general review

Introduction

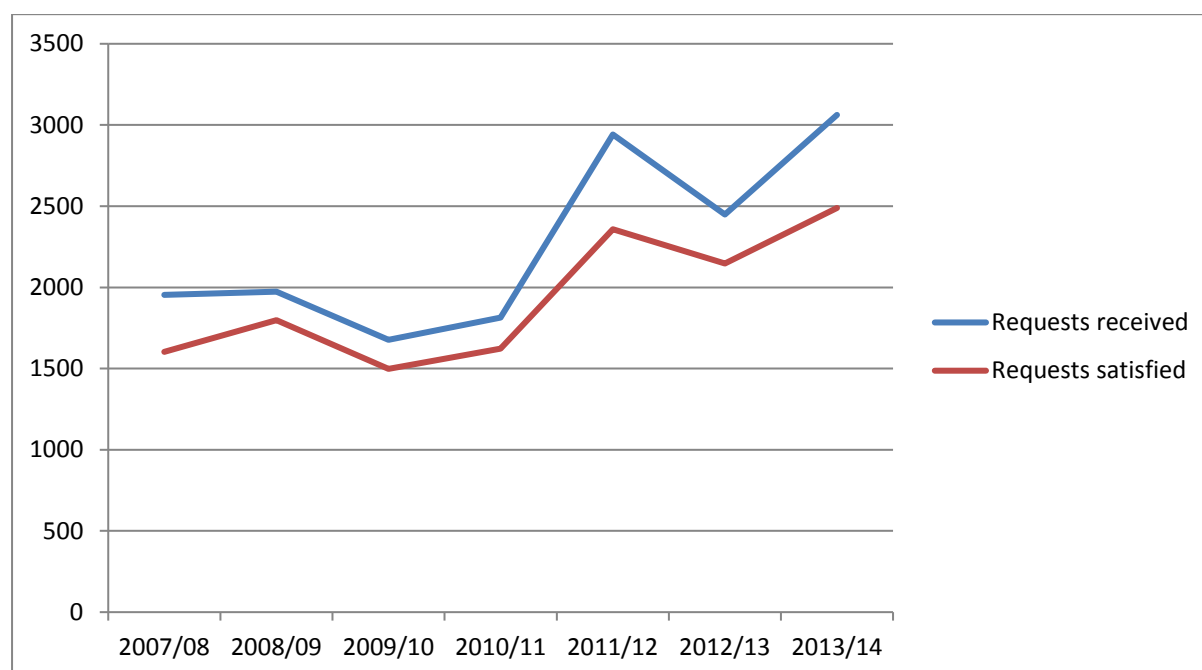
The document delivery service at the University of Kent has existed in its current form since 2009. It serves around 17,500 students and about 600 members of academic and research staff at the university's Canterbury campus.

Document delivery applications are submitted through an online form. Requests are processed by ILL staff via Voyager ILL (currently version 6.7.3), an Ex Libris database system which is linked to the circulation module of our Library Management System (LMS). All requests are manually checked and if necessary modified. British Library applications are sent via ARTEmail, requests for other institutions are sent via email. Temporary item records can be created by the system so interlibrary loans can be issued to borrower accounts electronically.

Demand analysis

Over the past decade the document delivery service at the University of Kent has seen a considerable rise in demand. Apart from a slight slump in the academic years 2009/10 and 2012/13 there has been a steady increase in applications and fulfilled requests, with a noticeable 60% rise in 2011/12 (see Fig 1):

Fig 1: ILL requests 2007-14

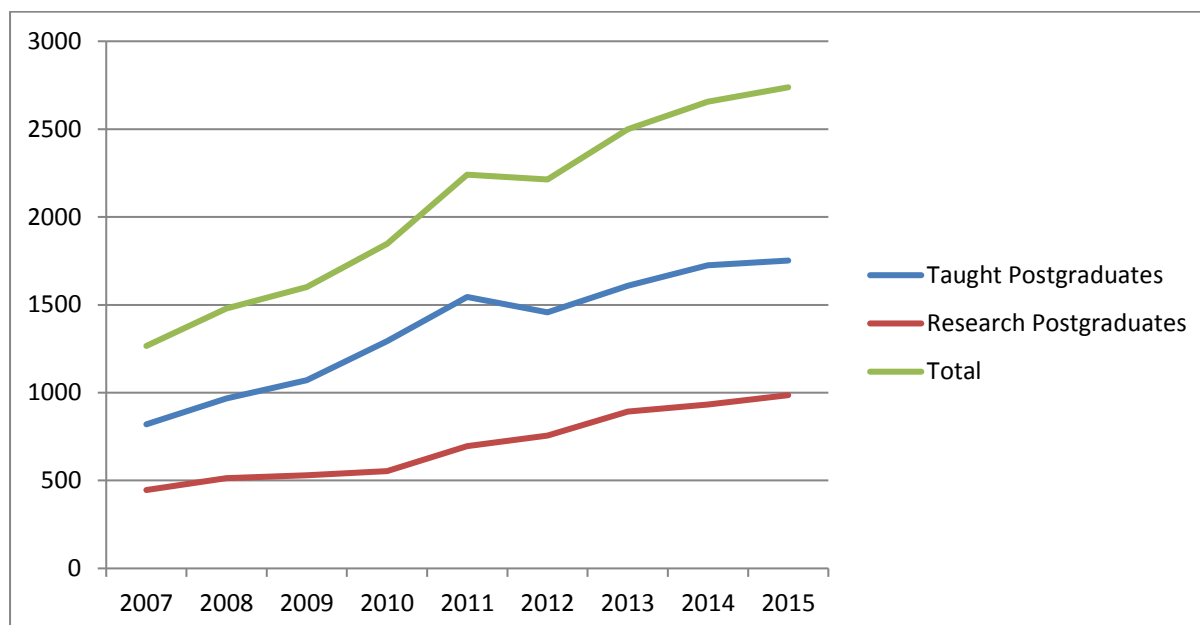


These figures are in contrast to a nationally downward trend for ILL requests (Prowse 2009). A thorough examination of ILL applications suggests that a variety of reasons are behind this development. The following factors are deemed to play a prominent role:

Users

Requests from postgraduate students account for the majority of document delivery applications. Like most universities Kent has a growing number of postgraduate students (see Fig 2):

Fig 2: Postgraduate students at University of Kent Canterbury campus



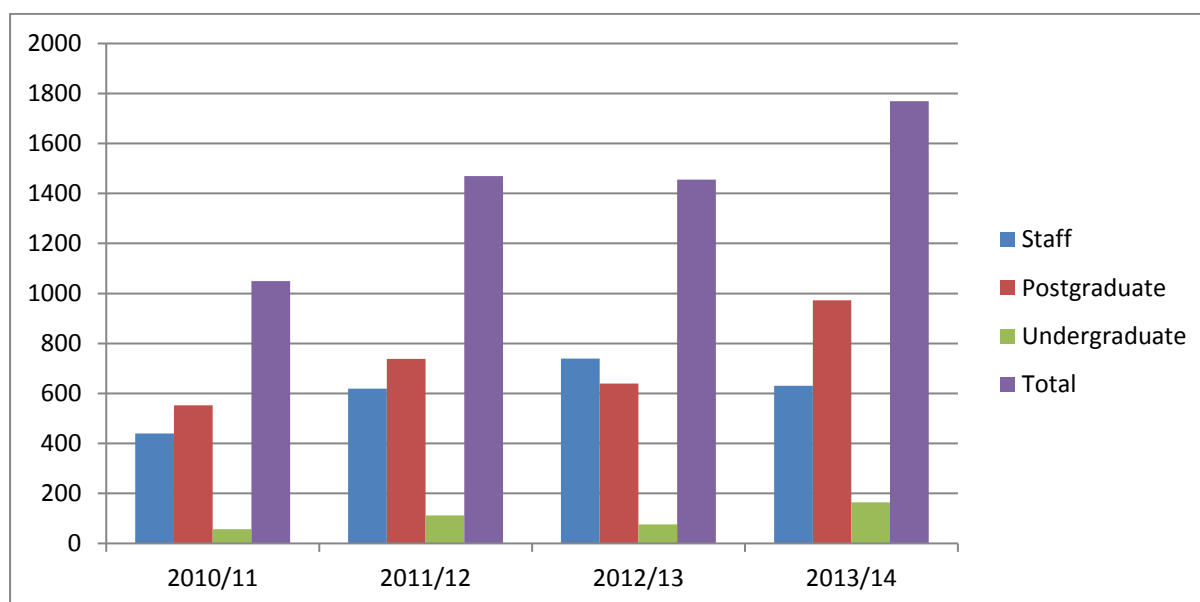
Many of the postgraduate users of the ILL service conduct research in niche topics, something that is encouraged by academic schools. This provides a dilemma for supervisors and subject librarians: As the required literature is often not suitable for a wider library audience it is preferably sourced via document delivery.

A similar growth has taken place within the academic and research community which is currently around 600 members strong. For strategic reasons a number of high-profile researchers, often with very narrow specialist subjects, have been appointed during the last five years. For the provision of material needed for research rather than teaching again ILL is the preferred route taken.

Within these two groups there is a cluster of requesters accounting for a substantial number of ILL applications: In 2013/14 the top 15 users accounted for almost 12% of satisfied requests. Similar tendencies can be seen for previous years. A third factor that contributes to the ILL demand is the growing number of undergraduate students required to write dissertations in their final year. Changes in school policy have made these research projects mandatory for most subjects in humanities and social sciences. Academic schools set aside funds to support undergraduate research. These funds are partly used to pay for document delivery material.

The following chart (Fig 3) illustrates the trend in satisfied interlending applications for different user groups in humanities and social sciences (core subjects only):

Fig 3: Core subject requests by user status



Service set-up

The set-up of the document delivery service is thought to be another factor for the high demand of ILL material. The service is free of charge for staff and postgraduate students of the University of Kent and is subsidised by the academic schools, most of which also fund undergraduate requests to a limited extent. EThOS digitisation orders and foreign applications sourced via the British Library premium service are generally granted.

There seems to be a direct link between visibility and promotion of the service and application trends: In 2011 a link to the online request form was placed on the library catalogue homepage directing users to the ILL service. Remarkably the academic year 2011/12 saw a 60% increase in document delivery applications. An active promotion of the service by subject librarians in recent years also seems to have contributed to the high demand.

Higher education landscape

Another explanation for our current ILL trend can be found in the unique geographical situation of the University of Kent. Due to the relative isolation within the higher education landscape no major collaborations with other large academic institutions exist.

Acquisition policy

Currently the library has no proactive purchase policy regarding document delivery applications. Literature that cannot be sourced via ILL is assessed on a case-by-case basis. In general only material deemed to be suitable for a wider library audience is purchased.

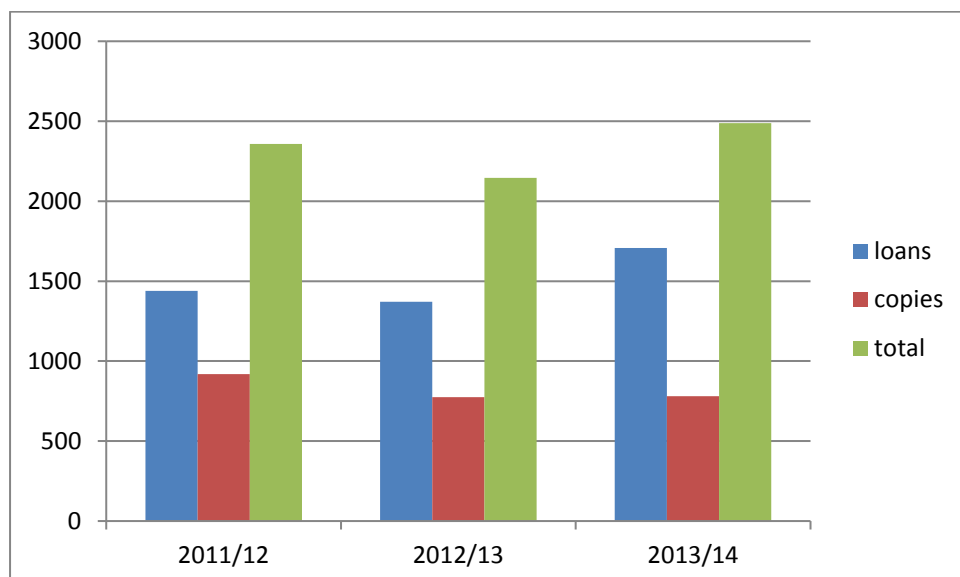
In autumn 2012 a patron-driven-acquisition (PDA) trial was conducted. The library provided a budget of £50,000. 104,000 eBook records were loaded into the catalogue. In total 761 eBooks were purchased within seven weeks. Social science titles accounted for around 50% and humanities titles for around 40% of the total books acquired, a pattern that is consistent with document delivery requests. The same academic year saw a notable decline in document delivery applications and orders as reflected in the annual figures (see Fig 1 and Fig 4). There seems to be a direct link between PDA and document delivery demand.

Journal subscriptions and open access

There is evidence that package deals and a general increase in online resources and the growing wealth of open access material has had an effect on document delivery requests for journal articles. Serial subscriptions saw a 145% rise during the last five years. Figures from the academic years 2011/12, 2012/13 and 2013/14 suggest that demand for articles declined during that period while the supply of book loans grew around 15%. In 2011/12 satisfied photocopy requests¹ made up 39% of total ILL items supplied. In 2012/13 this portion fell to 36% and again to 31% in 2013/14 (see Fig 4).

Fig 4: Satisfied loan and photocopy requests 2011-14

¹ Photocopy requests include copies of journal articles **and** book chapters.



Service review

A review of the document delivery service was carried out in Spring 2013 in order to improve the overall user experience and to identify efficiencies that would allow us to deliver a better service and meet the growing demand within our existing resources. Several areas were identified where adjustments and changes - within the restrictions that our LMS imposes - would contribute to achieve the desired effect.

Authorisation of applications

Previously most document delivery requests required authorisation from subject librarians (acting as budget holders for the academic schools) prior to processing. The result was a considerable delay in the application process. Consequently it has been proposed to abandon this practice and to introduce a quota system. Furthermore all subject librarians would receive monthly statistics with detailed information for all requests in spreadsheet format. Quotas vary from school to school but typically the allowance for undergraduate students would be three requests and for postgraduate students and members of academic staff 10-15 requests per academic year. Once quotas were exceeded the relevant subject librarian would be alerted. ILL staff would still flag up expensive requests such as EThOS digitalisation orders and foreign applications.

Circulation of interlibrary loans

The area of the service that saw the most significant changes was the circulation of document delivery loans. Proposals and suggestions in that respect came mainly from our lending services staff and management. Lending staff and borrowers alike were often left frustrated when dealing with interlibrary loans. These “foreign objects” did not seem to conform to any standard borrowing and renewal procedures. They had arbitrary lending periods as due dates vary from lender to lender, and all queries had to be referred to the ILL team located in a different part of the library. Document delivery loans were manually issued to borrower accounts by ILL staff prior to the point of collection and remained issued until either returned by borrowers or, if uncollected, retrieved by ILL staff. As a consequence users sometimes had books on their library account that they did not collect, and under certain circumstances they even incurred overdue fines if these loans were not collected and discharged in time by document delivery staff. Furthermore, interlibrary loans could only be renewed by emailing the document delivery service several days in advance, and British Library renewals were charged at £5.

The idea behind the changes was to bring the ILL circulation workflow in line with current library borrowing procedures in order to appear more or less seamless to users. The loan desk would become the main reference point for all circulation-related inquiries and frontline staff would be able to assist with most queries relating to borrowing and renewing and could thereby relieve the document delivery service. In order to accomplish this it has been proposed to treat interlibrary loans like standard library reservations: They would be held for a maximum number of seven days and issued at the point of collection for four weeks regardless of the return date specified by the lending institution. Borrowers would be able to renew their ILL items once for another four weeks via their library account.

Around two thirds of our interlibrary loans are supplied by the British Library and they fit perfectly into this workflow: They are lent for six weeks and are automatically renewed if not returned after the initial lending period. For loans from other institutions with lending periods of less than six weeks a permission for an extension of the lending period would have to be sought.

User renewals of interlibrary loans from libraries other than the BL would be monitored via reports extracted regularly from the circulation module. For that purpose changes to the circulation matrix of our LMS (Voyager) have been made. Two new

categories are now available on the item record to classify interlibrary loans as either “British Library” or “other library” items. Other modifications of the circulation module were made to restrict the number of renewals for document delivery loans and to bring overdue fines in line with standard library regulations. Furthermore, interlibrary loans are now included in automatic reminders users receive from our LMS.

Finance and invoicing

Document delivery material is paid for by the academic schools that provide designated funds for that purpose. Currently more than 30 individual document delivery school funds exist. Previously every line item on the monthly British Library invoice was charged against the relevant school fund and general costs such as handling charges and VAT were split among all related school funds. As this had been a very time consuming and laborious process the creation of a central fund for the document delivery service was proposed. School budgets would be charged according to their monthly document delivery usage by transferring relevant costs into the central ILL fund. All revenue from the service such as library fines and claims for ILL material supplied to other libraries would be entered into the main fund. Charges for document delivery items and related costs would be paid from the central document delivery fund. In order to cover BL renewals and other associated costs like handling, postage and VAT charges for interlibrary loans had to be adjusted. Consequently schools would be charged £8.50 instead of £8.00 for each photocopy and £13.75 instead of £12.50 for each loan.

Planning and communication of the changes

Quite unexpectedly the planning and discussions around the proposed changes and the task of communicating them to users and staff presented a much greater challenge than the actual implementation of these modifications.

Many meetings were held with lending management, IT, subject librarians, and colleagues from finance and publishing. After reviewing the workflow and identifying the processes that needed to be modified we compiled a list of people who would be affected by the changes:

- borrowers, mainly postgraduate students and members of academic staff
- subject librarians

- representatives from academic schools to whom we had to “sell” the changes and justify the price rise

- loan desk staff whose work flow would change

A number of channels were then identified which would be used to communicate the proposed changes:

- the document delivery website where all changes were announced
- the document delivery online form which briefly informed about the main modifications
- leaflets placed inside interlibrary loans and distributed in the library (especially at the loan desk) and in the academic schools
- book wrappers for interlibrary loans that explained the new borrowing and renewal procedures
- subject librarians who communicated the changes to school representatives orally and in writing
- meetings with library user groups
- newsletters and social media via the publishing team
- emails to user groups such as postgraduate students
- automatic reply messages via the interlibrary loans shared email box briefly outlining the changes
- training sessions with loan desk staff for information and instruction purposes

From April until July 2013 we ran a pilot to test and review all modifications. For the transition period users borrowing items under the old borrowing procedures were alerted to this fact by leaflets placed inside their books. In addition all interlibrary loans were issued with notices outlining the new borrowing regulations and with feedback forms.

Implementation and impact of the changes

The implementation of the proposed modifications required only minor changes to the document delivery service workflow. The text on the book wrappers provided with interlibrary loans had to be altered, renewal reports to monitor renewals of document delivery loans were now regularly run and subject librarians had to be provided with detailed monthly borrowing statistics.

The elimination of the approval stage for document delivery requests has accelerated the ordering process. Received loans can be processed faster as they are no longer issued by ILL staff at that stage. Standardisation of lending procedures and

the option to self-renew has resulted in fewer queries and renewal requests. In addition, invoicing procedures could be considerably simplified.

After the pilot it was agreed that the proposed changes would be implemented permanently.

Feedback

During the pilot period interlibrary loans were issued with a feedback questionnaire (see Appendix 1). After the pilot we evaluated all nine feedback forms and other feedback we had received. All of those who filled in the forms thought the changes to be an improvement. Three users especially praised the speed of the service, two labelled the service as “hassle-free” and one borrower characterised the service as “student friendly”. Two users voiced concerns about the reduced collection period. Whereas previously interlibrary loans were kept for the entire length of the lending period specified by the lending institution, under the new regulations they are only held for one week. 14 borrowers emailed document delivery during the trial period to explain that they were unable to collect their loan items within one week. In all instances reservation periods were extended. Ultimately the cancellation message users receive after the end of the reservation period can serve to encourage them to collect their loans.

Financial implications

A number of factors cause concern about the ability of the document delivery service to remain sustainable. One factor is that as expected the number of renewals increased considerably after borrowers were given a self-renewal option which has increased the costs for the British Library service (Table 1):

Table 1: Increase in renewals from the British Library

BL	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Renewals												
2012/13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	9	23	31
2013/14	42	30	38	41	61	61	16	52	30	70	31	20

Another concern is the annual increase of charges for document delivery items from both the British Library and other institutions. These price changes, combined with an

expected further rise in BL renewal costs, will put a strain on the document delivery budget. The situation will be monitored carefully in order to decide whether document delivery charges have to be adjusted.

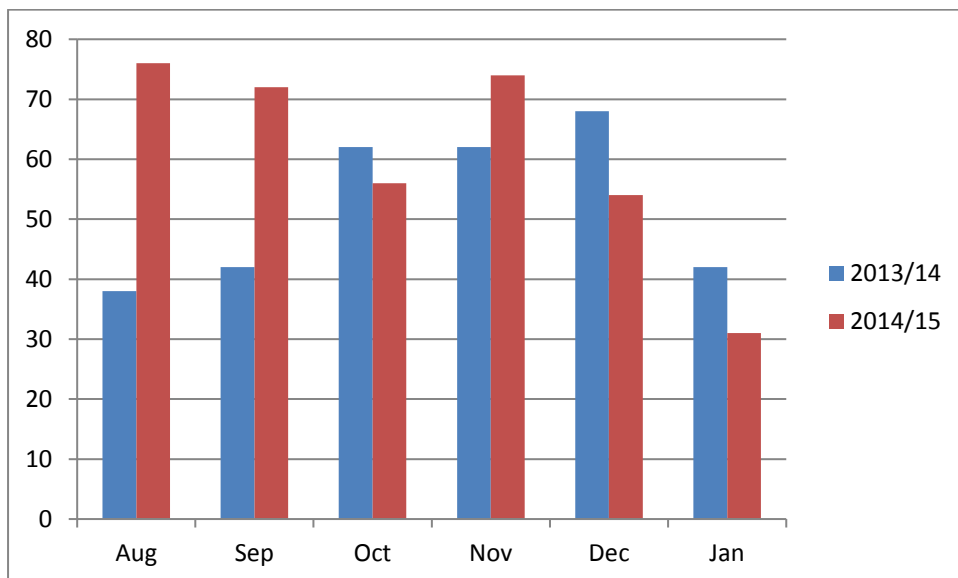
Outlook

We are currently looking into the possibility of extending the document delivery service to around 330 users based at one of the University of Kent's centres of study outside the UK. So far staff and students at our Brussels campus have access to the library services of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel but this arrangement will end in the near future and alternatives have to be explored. One option would be to administer a British Library Document Supply Service (BLDSS) account on behalf of our Brussels users. All staff and students based in Brussels have library accounts and can submit ILL requests using our online form. Interlending applications would have to be sent directly via BLDSS. Photocopies could be supplied electronically either directly to the end user or forwarded by Canterbury ILL staff. Loans could be sent directly from the British Library to an administrator in Brussels and would then be returned the same way. For loans not available from the BL we could use the British Library Get It For Me (GIFM) premium service. A procedure would need to be agreed with Brussels for the reporting, receipting and returning of loans.

Predictions

The change in UK copyright legislation in 2014 now permits interlenders to supply articles from electronic journals which means that orders previously declined on copyright grounds can now be supplied. Figures at Kent University suggest that overall there has been an increase in satisfied photocopy requests in the first half of the academic year 2014/15 as compared to last year:

Fig 5: Satisfied photocopy requests



It is too early to make any predictions and it remains to be seen how we compare with the national trend.

Despite this small revival, statistics for the same period suggest that 2014/15 will see a slight decline in document delivery demand. While satisfied photocopy requests rose from 272 to 332 in the months of August to January 2014/15 as compared to the corresponding months in 2013/14, the number of supplied loans fell from 681 to 531 during the same period. The implementation of “Library Search”, a new resource discovery tool system, in January 2015 will greatly improve the searchability of our electronic resources. Therefore it is expected that the number of journal article requests will fall.

References

Prowse, S. (2009), “Recent developments in remote document supply (RDS) in the UK – 4”, *Interlending & Document Supply*, Vol. 37 No. 2, pp. 100-104.

Appendix 1: Document delivery service feedback questionnaire



Document delivery service feedback

We have changed the document delivery service, to bring the borrowing experience more in line with borrowing from the Templeman Library. This short survey will help us measure the success of this pilot.

Are you a regular user of the service? Yes ☐ No ☐

Do you think the new document delivery conditions are an improvement? Yes ☐ No ☐

If you answered 'Yes', please tell us what you like. Tick all that apply:

- ☐ the longer loan period
- ☐ being able to renew online
- ☐ email reminders for due dates
- ☐ lower fine rates
- ☐ other (please specify)

If you answered 'No', please tell us what you don't like about the new service:

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